



UNITED STATES SENATE  
**REPUBLICAN  
POLICY COMMITTEE**

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*Republicans Are the Party of Compassion*

# Senate Republicans Back President's Welfare Reform Plan

Building on the progress they made in fighting poverty by reforming welfare in 1996, Senate Republicans (led by Senators Hutchinson and Sessions) have introduced President Bush's blueprint to help even more Americans escape the welfare trap through work. [Millions of lives have improved](#) since Republicans reformed our nation's welfare system. Since the early 1990s, when state-level reforms began to take hold:

- **Welfare rolls have fallen dramatically.** Since 1993, welfare rolls as a share of population have dropped nearly two-thirds to their lowest point in almost 40 years ([HHS/Census Bureau](#)).
- **Poverty has declined across *all* categories.** Poverty among single-mom families and black children is the lowest ever recorded ([Census Bureau](#)).
- **More single mothers are employed and their income is rising.** Single mothers' earnings have increased *at the same time* their welfare income has decreased ([Brookings Institution](#)).
- **Out-of-wedlock births have leveled off.** The explosive growth in out-of-wedlock births has been slowed to a virtual halt and even fallen slightly among blacks ([Heritage Foundation](#)). Teen births also have declined ([Brookings Institution](#)).

Americans once trapped in a vicious cycle of poverty and dependence are now working with household incomes greater than when they were on the dole.

The President's welfare reform plan would build on this success by helping even more welfare recipients achieve self-reliance through work. As introduced by Senators Hutchinson and Sessions, it closely tracks (with some modifications) the "Personal Responsibility, Work, and Family Promotion Act" ([H.R. 4737](#)) passed by the House.

**Promoting independence through work.** Work is the key to breaking the cycle of welfare dependency and enabling families to become self-reliant. The President's plan contains several improvements over current law that would help even more families achieve independence:

- Each recipient would receive help charting out and fulfilling a work plan leading toward self-sufficiency.
- The President's plan would gradually increase work-participation standards until all states are required to have 70 percent of recipients putting in a 40-hour week (at least 24 hours in work, and up to 16 hours in work-related activities, such as job search/preparation, education, training, drug treatment, parenting education, marriage and relationship counseling, and counseling on domestic violence).
- The President's plan would give states credit toward the work-participation requirement for each recipient who gains employment (rather than for each recipient who leaves the caseload). Also under the Senate bill, all states must have no less than 55 percent of their caseloads putting in a 40-hour week by 2007, irrespective of credits and exemptions. These changes would prevent credits from effectively eliminating work-participation requirements.

**Improving services through state innovation.** In the late 1980s and early 1990s, federal waivers spurred state-level welfare reforms that benefitted both recipients and taxpayers. These successes in turn spurred nationwide reform. To unleash the knowledge and energies of state experts, the President's plan would expand the state's ability to use local knowledge to improve services:

- States could apply for authority to integrate and improve the services delivered by anti-poverty programs from different federal departments. This would free states from overly restrictive rules, allowing them to find more effective ways of meeting the programs' goals. Eligible programs would include Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF), Food Stamps, Workforce Investment, the Wagner-Peyser Act, Housing and Homeless Assistance, and Child Care.
- Five states would be permitted to improve the Food Stamp program through a block grant that would allow them to tailor services under the program to meet the needs of their recipients.

**Promoting Healthy Marriage and Family Formation.** The President's plan would authorize up to \$300 million annually to states to promote healthy marriage and family formation. Funds may be used for marriage education, relationship-skills programs, and pre-marital education and counseling. The bill also reauthorizes the abstinence-education program.

**Funding.** The President's plan would maintain TANF funding at \$16.5 billion per year, despite a 50-percent drop in caseloads since 1996 when this funding level was set. It also would reauthorize the supplemental grants.